

Problems that keep us from Jesus, Part 2 - Acts 21:25-29 – August 23rd, 2009

- Paul has only been in Jerusalem a couple of days on this his third and final missionary journey, and he's already facing some problems.
- The problem with these problems is that they become obstacles and hindrances to a personal and saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

- This is part two of a series titled; "Problems that keep us from Jesus." We're about to uncover and identify a number of these problems.

1. Traditions and customs (Verses 20b-21)

- Paul is accused of teaching the believing Jews to turn away from the law Moses, and living according to Jewish traditions and customs.

2. Appeasing and pleasing (Verses 22-24)

- They present Paul with a plan to pay the expenses of four men who had taken the Nazarite vow, hoping to appease his accusers.

3. Duplicity and partiality (Verse 25)

25 As for the Gentile believers, we have written to them our decision that they should abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality."

- v25 They address a problem with the Gentiles who were stumbling the Jews by not abstaining from certain foods and sexual immorality.
- They inform Paul that they have already written to the Gentile believers about their decision to not require them to follow Jewish laws.
- The problem is that they're displaying both duplicity and partiality between the Jews and the Gentiles. In Christ there's no distinction.

Galatians 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. NIV

Proverbs 11:3 The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity. NIV

Proverbs 24:23 These also are sayings of the wise: To show partiality in judging is not good: NIV

- For these Jerusalem elders to tell Paul this is a demonstration of partiality towards the Jews, and it's duplicity towards the Gentiles.
 - In other words, their saying that while the Jews are subject to, and need to adhere to these Jewish laws, the Gentiles are not.
 - One has to wonder why it is that these Jerusalem elders would suggest such a thing to Paul, and why Paul wouldn't see right through it.
- One commentator suggested that by them saying this, "they made the pill easier for Paul to swallow because he would have been up in arms in a moment had he thought the demands they were making on him might be the thin end of some wedge they wanted to drive into the Gentile churches."

4. Compromising and cowering (Verse 26)

26 The next day Paul took the men and purified himself along with them. Then he went to the temple to give notice of the date when the days of purification would end and the offering would be made for each of them.

- v26 We're told that the next day Paul takes them and proceeds forward with the purification ritual by announcing the days in the temple.
- It is my personal belief that Paul is sort of cowering and acquiescing to the Jerusalem elders by going through with their Nazarite vows.
- One reason I believe this is that, in the next verse, God will stop him from taking these laws and rituals too far by offering sacrifices.

"It is an open question whether he was justified in this course of action. He was certainly carrying the principle of being all things to all men quite as far as it could be defended. He must have felt that legal purifications were out of date, and he could only have consented to practice them in order to please the Jewish brethren. We ought to admire his desire for peace; yet we cannot shut our eyes to the fact that peace was not the result after all; on the contrary, this conciliatory act led to the apostle's imprisonment, and to his being carried in bonds to Rome, ...Servants of God must expect to be misunderstood, and, perhaps, all the more so when for the sake of promoting harmony they yield to compromises"

Charles Spurgeon

- Paul may have good intentions but he's going about doing it in a bad way. By going ahead with this he cowers to the Jerusalem church.
- The Jerusalem church wasn't as powerful as the other churches because they were still caught up in traditionalism and compromise.

- This was the reason for the Book of Hebrews. Don't go back to the old sacrificial system, as they are only pictures pointing to Christ.
- This is the problem that kept Jews from coming to Christ. They only saw the law, and couldn't see the one who came to fulfill the law.

5. Antagonism and opposition (Verses 27-29)

27 When the seven days were nearly over, some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple. They stirred up the whole crowd and seized him, 28 shouting, "Men of Israel, help us! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against our people and our law and this place. And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple area and defiled this holy place." 29(They had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with Paul and assumed that Paul had brought him into the temple area.)

- v27 Before the end of the seven days of purification, some Jews see Paul at the temple, start a riot, and Paul ends up getting arrested.
- v28 They shout and falsely accuse Paul of teaching against the Laws of Judaism and for bringing Greeks into the temple and defiling it.
- v29 Were parenthetically told the reason was their false accusations were based on assumptions because they had seen Trophimus.

"Five lies. Sha'ul did not teach 'against the people' or 'against the Torah' or 'against this place' (the Temple); nor had he 'brought some Goyim into the Temple' or 'defiled this holy place.' The accusations were precisely the ones most likely to stir up feeling against him. A Gentile entering the Temple's inner court would ceremonially defile it."

David H. Stern "Jewish New Testament Commentary" p. 305

"The charges against the apostle were utterly false. Never had he spoken against the Jews, nor their temple, and so far from polluting the holy place he was doing it too much honor."

Charles Spurgeon

- The riot is started because, while Gentiles could be in the outer court, they were absolutely forbidden to go past this outer courtyard.
- There was actually a sign that warned any Gentile entering in would be put to death and Paul is being accused of allowing them in.

- This is exactly what the antagonistic Jews were hoping for, an opportunity to take these outrageous claims, and use them against Paul.
- It's important that we understand how much these Jews hated Paul because of his fruitful ministry in Asia, and especially in Ephesus.

One commentator said it this way; "Religious hatred is never overly concerned about the truth of a matter when it has finally found a way to get even with the object of its dislike."

- One of the problems we are faced with today is the antagonism and the opposition from both within and from without the church.

2 Corinthians 7:5 5 For, when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears. KJV

"Antagonists are individuals who on the basis of non-substantive evidence, go out of their way to make insatiable demands, usually attacking the person or performance of others. These attacks are selfish in nature, tearing down rather than building up, and are frequently directed against those in a leadership capacity."

Kenneth C. Haugk "Antagonists in the Church"